

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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SUBJ: NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR UNIFICATION (NCU) ELECTION

REF: SEOUL 3406

1. SUMMARY: FEWER CANDIDATES THAN EXPECTED ARE RUNNING FOR NCU. ALTHOUGH RURAL INTEREST MAY STILL BE HIGH, ATMOSPHERE IN SEOUL AND PROVINCIAL CAPITALS SUGGESTS SOME DEGREE OF URBAN VOTER APATHY. ROKG HAS BEGUN TO SHOW SIGNS OF CONCERN OVER POSSIBILITY OF LOWER THAN ANTICIPATED VOTER TURNOUT. END SUMMARY.

2. AS NCU CAMPAIGN ENTERS FINAL WEEK, APPROXIMATELY 5,450 CANDIDATES REMAIN IN RUNNING FOR 2,583 SEAT NCU. THIS COMPETITION RATIO OF TWO CANDIDATES PER SEAT IS NOTICEABLY LOWER THAN FIRST NCU SIX YEARS AGO (2.5:1) AND IS LESS THAN ANTICIPATED. ONLY TWO-THIRDS OF INCUMBENTS HAVE CHOSEN TO RUN AGAIN. REGISTRATION FIGURES REVEAL LOW COMPETITION IN URBAN VIS-A-VIS RURAL AREAS (SEOUL - 1.6:1, PUSAN
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-1.4:1, REMOTE KANGWON-DO -2.7:1). AS RESULT, OVER 10 PERCENT OF NCU SEATS WILL BE FILLED THROUGH UNCONTESTED ONE-MAN RACES. COMPARED WITH FIRST NCU ELECTION, CANDIDATES OF BUSINESSMAN AND LOCAL SEMI-OFFICIALS (SUCH AS SAEMAUL LEADERS) HAVE INCREASED WHILE COLLEGE DEGREE HOLDERS HAVE DECLINED IN PERCENTAGE.

3. OBSERVERS HAVE CONSISTENTLY PORTRAYED VOTER INTEREST HIGHER IN SMALL RURAL COMMUNITIES THAN URBAN CENTERS. TELEVISION COVERAGE OF JOINT CANDIDATE SPEECH RALLIES IN SEOUL SUPPORTS IMPRESSION OF SEOUL VOTER DISINTEREST IN CAMPAIGN. IN ONE CASE, NEWS FILM SHOWED ROSTRUM OF SEVERAL CANDIDATES SPEAKING TO LESS THAN 100 PEOPLE (EVEN COUNTING SOME CURIOUS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS). SINCE CANDIDATES CANNOT SPEAK ON CONTROVERSIAL POLITICAL ISSUES, THEY SPEND THEIR ALLOTTED TIME AT THE MICROPHONE PRESENTING THEIR QUALIFICATIONS FOR OFFICE AND MAKING GENERAL PROMISES TO FAITHFULLY REPRESENT THE CONSTITUENTS. ELECTION LAW LIMITS EACH CANDIDATE ONE SUCH 20 MINUTE PUBLIC SPEECH DURING THE ENTIRE CAMPAIGN.

4. AS HOPED FOR BY DISSIDENTS, DEMONSTRATIONS (REPORTED SEPTELS) HAVE TAKEN PLACE AT SNU AND EHWA, VOICING STUDENT OPPOSITION TO, INTER ALIA, NCU AND YUSIN SYSTEM. ALTHOUGH MEDIA HAVE NOT REPORTED THESE DISTURBANCES, KNOWLEDGE OF THEM HAS REACHED OUTSIDE SEOUL. DEMONSTRATIONS AS YET HAVE NOT SPREAD TO OTHER CAMPUSES, AND THE IMPACT, OF ANY, OF THESE DEMONSTRATIONS ON THE NCU CAMPAIGN IS DIFFICULT TO MEASURE.

5. ROKG, UP TO NOW CONTENT TO ADVOCATE A CALM AND ORDERLY ELECTION (AVOIDING "OVERHEATED ELECTIONS OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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THE PAST"), MAY PRESENTLY BE MORE CONCERNED WITH POSSIBILITY OF LOW VOTER PARTICIPATION. (IN 1972 NCU ELECTION, 71 PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS CAST BALLOTS.) ON MAY 10, MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS KIM CH'I-YOL REMINDED CITIZENS THAT THEIR FRANCHISE IS NOT ONLY A "SACRED RIGHT" BUT ALSO A "SACRED DUTY". AT THE SAME TIME, KIM ENLISTED THE HELP OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO UNDERTAKE AN "ENLIGHTENMENT" DRIVE TO HEAD OFF VOTER ABSENTEEISM. THESE ACTIONS CONTRAST WITH PRIOR GOVERNMENT POLICY WHICH CENTERED ALMOST ENTIRELY ON PREVENTING ILLEGAL CAMPAIGN PRACTICES AND PARTISAN INVOLVEMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES, SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

6. MINISTER KIM ALSO ISSUED WARNING THAT BOYCOTT OF NCU ELECTION "WILL NOT BE TOLERATED" AND THOSE "AGITATING" VOTERS TO BOYCOTT WILL FACE STRICT PUNISHMENT. (DUP HAS LAUNCHED CAMPAIGN FOR BOYCOTT; NDP OPPOSES NCU AND ADVOCATES RETURN TO DIRECT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WITH POLITICAL PARTY PARTICIPATION.) MORE LIKELY THAN WIDESPREAD BOYCOTT, HOWEVER, IS POSSIBILITY THAT SIMPLE VOTER APATHY WITH NON-POLITICAL/NON-PARTISAN

NCU CAMPAIGN MIGHT RESULT IN POOR VOTER TURNOUT.
SHOULD THIS OCCUR, OPPOSITION PARTIES AND DISSIDENTS
WILL SURELY USE THIS AS EVIDENCE OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR
THEIR CAMPAIGN TO REPLACE NCU AND CHALLENGE YUSIN.
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